

January 31, 2012

His Excellency Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General of the United Nations
United Nations
New York, New York 10017

Re: Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict

Dear Mr. Secretary-General,

We represent human rights and humanitarian organizations that work in more than 100 countries worldwide to protect the rights of children, including children affected by armed conflict. We are writing in response to your announcement on January 25, 2012 that your Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG), Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, will be leaving her post the middle of this year.

The Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict plays an indispensable role in global efforts to protect children in armed conflict. We and countless local partners struggling to protect their children from the ravages of war have greatly appreciated Ms. Coomaraswamy's leadership and the concrete and significant accomplishments that she has achieved on behalf of these children. Year by year Ms. Coomaraswamy's work has demonstrated your own potential to make immeasurable improvements in the lives of the world's most vulnerable people through your carefully selected Special Representatives. She has been a crucial vital partner for both NGOs and UN member states and has worked closely with the Security Council to develop a robust and vital mechanism to address effectively the violations that children in armed conflict suffer. As you consider the selection of Ms. Coomaraswamy's successor, we would like to emphasize the vital importance of this mandate and its role in the UN system.

The accomplishments of the current SRSG on children and armed conflict have included the following:

- Seventeen UN action plans signed with both governments and non-state armed groups to end violations against children, including parties in Afghanistan, Chad, Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Philippines, Nepal, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Uganda. As a result, thousands of child soldiers have been demobilized, and countless children have been protected from recruitment and other abuses;
- Twenty-five country visits to engage with governments and armed groups regarding the recommendations of the Security Council and its working group on children and armed conflict, securing national and international media attention, and political commitments from senior officials;



- Implementation with UNICEF and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) of a groundbreaking UN monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict that documents grave violations against children in 15 countries, in order to provide the Security Council with the objective and timely information that it requires for action;
- Production of thirty-eight reports between 2006 and 2011 for the Security Council's working group on children and armed conflict on specific country situations;
- Serving on your behalf as a global advocate for the millions of children affected by armed conflict before the media, the International Criminal Court, and in other significant fora, and highlighting new areas of work that the international community must address, for example, growing attacks on education.

During our many years of work, we have seen significant advances in the children and armed conflict agenda that have benefited the lives of countless children on the ground. The SRSG is a central and irreplaceable component of these efforts and plays a unique role with states and other actors to advocate for the protection of children in armed conflict, and your continued commitment to furthering these efforts through your next Special Representative will be crucial.

Going forward, we believe that the mandate of the SRSG should be retained in its current form, and note the consensus of the 66th UN General Assembly in requesting a renewal of the mandate for a further three years. We believe that any restructuring of the mandate could weaken or dilute this important office. Continuing violations against children in armed conflict and other situations of concern require continued strong leadership and action from a dedicated SRSG for children and armed conflict.

As you consider candidates for appointment as the next SRSG, we would encourage you to consider candidates that:

- Have a demonstrated commitment to promote and protect the human rights of all children;
- Have a proven track-record of public advocacy for human rights, and will bring courage, dynamism, and leadership to the position;
- Have the willingness and ability to conduct field missions, including missions conducted under difficult circumstances in conflict areas;
- Have the willingness to act urgently in situations requiring immediate attention, and to speak out regardless of where violations occur;
- Have a proven ability to work effectively with UN member states, UN agencies, civil society, and other key stakeholders, including children;
- Have strong diplomatic skills and the ability to engage both governments and non-state actors regarding violations against children;
- Have the highest international standing and integrity.

We also urge you to conduct a transparent selection process, making public the qualifications you seek for the position; the timeline for nominations, shortlisting, and final selection; and consulting widely with all stakeholders, including NGOs that work on children and armed conflict.

The new SRSG on children and armed conflict will be crucial to continuing efforts to end violations against children in armed conflict. This position is a vital element in the UN system and requires a compelling leader to speak and act on behalf of children.

We would be happy to consult with you regarding this important choice.

Yours sincerely,

Amnesty International
CARE International
Child Rights International Network
Child Soldiers International
Human Rights Watch
Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
International Rescue Committee
Norwegian Refugee Council
Save the Children
Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict
Women's Refugee Commission
World Vision International

cc:

Ambassador Peter Wittig, chair, Security Council working group on children and armed conflict
Mr. Vijay Nambiar, Chef de Cabinet
Mr. Kim Won-soo, Deputy Chef de Cabinet